

# Carges celebrates his 25th year as a priest

By CHARLES DEMOTTE  
Special to The Journal

**O**VER THE PAST quarter century, the Roman Catholic Church — like the rest of society — has undergone some profound changes. In 1960, America elected its first Catholic president, John F. Kennedy, generating a new sense of idealism throughout the country that was to have a profound impact on events for decades to come. The same year, the Rev. Bernard Lewis Carges of Immaculate Conception parish joined the priesthood. Carges celebrates his 25th anniversary as a priest this year.

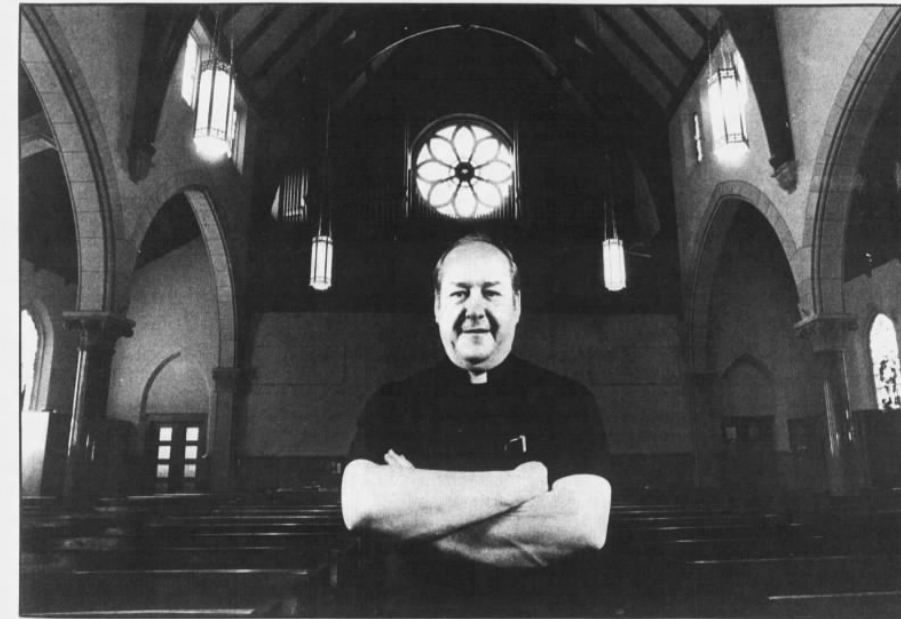
Father Carges was born and raised in Rochester. He attended St. Andrews High School and St. Bernard's Seminary and was ordained on June 4, 1960. His first assignment was in Geneva where he spent "five very happy years with some excellent priests who helped me get established." He also taught at DeSales High School, which brought him to the attention of the bishop — who sent him to Kearney High School in Rochester. There, Carges was chaplain for two and a half years. These were years of turmoil — 1965 to 1968 — and Carges noted that it was a very "unsettling time" for Catholics.

Next, he went to Auburn as an assistant priest. "Teaching in a high school was looked upon as being a luxury," Carges said. "I was ordained to be a parish priest and I wanted to be a parish priest. All my assignments have been good ones. I have always been surrounded by other priests, which is a bit unusual."

Nearly 10 years ago, Carges came to Ithaca where he has served the parish of Immaculate Conception. He characterized his ministry here as a "period of stability" following the turmoil of the 1960s and early 70s, when the Vietnam War divided the parish and its council.

Carges said his main concern has been to try to get people to feel comfortable with priests. "My priority has been to keep things at peace for awhile so people could settle down, start re-thinking and feel comfortable with their faith once more," Carges said. People have greater freedom to choose and pick out what they want in the church. "We are all part of God's family."

Another problem Carges concerned himself with is finance. When he came to Immaculate Conception 10 years ago, the parish was in deep debt. Through prudent management, the parish has been



TAMMY PRESLEY/Journal Staff

The Rev. Bernard L. Carges celebrates his 10th year as pastor of Immaculate Conception Church and the 25th anniversary of his ordination as a priest.

able to establish itself financially.

Putting the school on a sound monetary basis has been particularly challenging, he said. "We are on the right road." The centennial endowment fund for the school is heading toward \$200,000 with nearly \$120,000 collected already. "If we can get that, it will relieve the parents of high tuition costs."

Looking over his 25 years in the priesthood, Carges observed the emergence of a number of vital issues that confront the Catholic Church. The main issue, he said, that will come more to the foreground as time goes on, is friction

in attitudes between the American Catholic Church and the Vatican. One point of contention is the role of women in the church. "I am not sure which way things will develop," Carges said.

Other problems deal with living in a pluralistic society and coping with certain trends and values that it creates. While the elderly do not have problems coping, he said, middle-aged people find it difficult to accept change. Younger people, meanwhile, seem more traditional and "seem to be more at peace with themselves."

There also is a question of liber-

ation theology and how to tackle economic and political situations where there is a lack of justice. The controversy sullages over this, even among priests.

Carges also spoke of the continued shortage of priests that is crippling the ability of the church to function in certain areas. He cited the district of Lansing, King Ferry and Scipio Center, which has been amalgamated into a single unit and is handled by a team ministry. "At every conference of priests everyone seems to be getting older. There are not that many young men."

One of the problems of staffing the Catholic Church is that nobody wants his parish to close. "If the bishop decided to terminate Immaculate Conception, you could imagine the kind of civil war the people here would raise," Carges said.

Staffing problems have arisen over the past 15 years or so. Even his old seminary of St. Bernard's is closed.

The main duties of a priest are service to the people in his parish to "meet their needs in every way possible." Every parish is unique, Carges said, and in Ithaca there is a surprising amount of poverty and

alienation that demands attention. "We get a lot of people stopping by needing to talk. There are a lot of emotional problems and a lot of loneliness. Our time is pretty well taken up." Some people expect priests to be on call 24 hours a day, he said. "We try to cover ourselves and have someone here all the time."

In 1988, Carges will go to Rome for four months to update his theology and to find out more about issues affecting the church. In addition, Carges said, he hoped to travel more. Several years ago he led a tour to Europe and "once I got over there I got the travel bug."